

**Floor Statement by Senator Kent Conrad (D-ND)
on Points of Order Against Spending Reconciliation Conference Report
December 21, 2005**

This bill contains many violations of the rules. We are here because the majority insisted on ramming through bad legislation at the last moment with little or no public scrutiny. This 774-page bill was written behind closed doors with no input from the minority. It was filed in the dead of night and voted on in the House at the crack of dawn. Then House Members left town.

Let's remember that reconciliation is a special parliamentary process that allows legislation to be passed with fast-track procedures that restrict a Senator's right to debate and amend. Because of these fast-track procedures, the Byrd rule was adopted to prohibit extraneous, nonbudget-related provisions from being included.

The points of order that I am raising are all violations of the Byrd rule. I now raise these three points of order:

One, striking the Medicaid medical liability provision, which allows hospitals to deny treatment to low-income individuals who are unable to pay. Not only is the majority raising copayments on low-income Medicaid beneficiaries, but they are shielding hospitals from medical liability if they refuse to treat those low-income people who are unable to pay. That is wrong.

Two, striking the foster care provision that would prohibit grandparents from receiving foster care payments. The conference report includes a provision to overturn a Ninth Circuit Court case that allowed grandparents with limited incomes to receive foster care payments when parenting vulnerable children. That is as mean spirited as it is ill-conceived. We know that placing foster kids with their grandparents puts them in the most stable and healthy environment. Prohibiting support for grandparents who take in foster children is wrong.

Three, I am also raising points of order against reports focusing on policy matters that do not belong in a reconciliation bill. These reports have no budgetary effect whatsoever and should not be here.

I hope my colleagues will support these points of order so we can send this bill back to House. Let's use this opportunity to create a better product for the American people.

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Some of these matters are technical matters. But we have rules in this body for a reason. This legislation has many violations of the rules. I have chosen a few to raise today. Why? Because, colleagues, we could be voting all day on my points of order against this bill. I have tried to reduce it to one vote to accommodate colleagues. I could be here raising 12 or 15 points of order and ask for a vote on every single one of them. I have not done that. Yes, some of these matters are technical, but they are because we have rules.

I would say that the question of Medicaid liability is not a technicality. This is a question that allows hospitals to deny treatment to low-income individuals who are unable to pay. Not only is the majority raising copayments on low-income Medicaid beneficiaries, but they are shielding hospitals from medical liability if they refuse to treat those low-income people who are unable to pay. That is wrong.

Let me just say, on the foster care matter, we have a difference with the Parliamentarian. I believe there is a violation.

Again, I believe the foster care question that prohibits grandparents from receiving foster care payments is also well taken, but we understand there is a difference.

I raise the point of order pursuant to section 313(b)(1)(A) of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974 against section 5001(b)(3) and section 5001(b)(4) of the conference report because those provisions of title V regarding Medicaid produce no budgetary changes in outlays or revenues; and pursuant to section 313(b)(1)(D) of the Congressional Budget Act of 1974 against section 7404 regarding foster care, and the portion of section 6043 beginning on page 92, line 19, through page 93, line 2, which relates to the negligent standard for hospitals and physicians who treat Medicaid patients because any changes in outlays or revenues associated with those two provisions are merely incidental to the nonbudgetary components of those provisions.

I hope my colleagues will vote to sustain this point of order.